

Grand opening of *your* new Kenai Refuge Visitor Center

by Leah Eskelin and Candace Ward



A bronze bull moose by artist Stan Watts stands tall, welcoming guests to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center.



The Center's lobby overlooks the surrounding boreal forest through floor to ceiling windows. The masonry heater's hearth is a welcome place to sit and relax all year round.

Please join the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge staff for a very special occasion—the Grand Opening of *your* new Refuge Visitor Center on Saturday, May 30, from 1 – 5 PM.

At the top of Ski Hill Road in Soldotna, the new Visitor Center sits tucked into the hillside surrounded by boreal forest. The building features a sod roof, solar panels, cozy fireplace and floor-to-ceiling windows offering sweeping views of the Refuge, with Headquarters Lake peeking through the trees.

A state-of-the art exhibit hall welcomes visitors new and old to explore the Refuge from “Icefield to Ocean.” Representing the nearly 2 million acres of diverse habitats found on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, the exhibits are designed to be experienced. Climb into a beaver lodge, test your hand against the

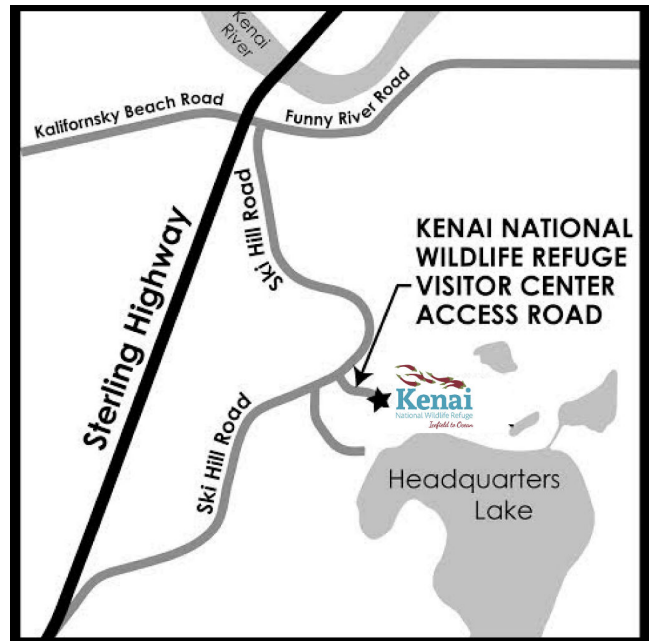
size of a brown bear's paw, and listen to the calls of local birds. Then contribute to our wall of comments and art by answering the question, "How are you connected to the Kenai Refuge?"



Exhibits designed by SplitRock Studios immerse visitors into the diverse habitats of the Refuge from Icefield to Ocean.

To find the Refuge Visitor Center when you arrive in Soldotna, travel to mile 95 of the Sterling Highway, crossing the Kenai River Bridge. Once you cross the river, immediately get in the far left turn lane and make a left on to Funny River Road. As soon as you are on Funny River Road, prepare for an immediate right turn onto Ski Hill Road. Ski Hill Road is gravel, and you will drive one mile up the hill and make a left turn onto a paved road leading to the Visitor Center.

Two million acres does give GPS-based apps a challenge when tasked to pinpoint "Kenai National Wildlife Refuge." To find the Visitor Center on a map app if you are travelling from outside the central Kenai Peninsula, or if you haven't been to visit before, use the building's physical address: 33398 Ski Hill Road, Soldotna, Alaska 99669.



The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center in Soldotna sits at the top of Ski Hill Road. Access it from the Sterling Highway across from Skyview Middle School or from Funny River Road between the go-cart track and Spenard Builders Supply sign.

The Center opens with a celebratory ribbon cutting at 1 PM on Saturday, May 30th. After the doors open, enjoy viewing the new exhibits, special "behind the scenes" presentations, fun family activities, door prizes, and a finale hot dog picnic BBQ from 4 – 5 PM. Enjoy being part of ushering in a new era at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge! See you at the Grand Opening!

Leah Eskelin and Candace Ward, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge rangers and year-round hosts at the new Visitor Center, will be assisted by summer rangers and volunteers from the community and throughout the U.S. Find more information at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/> or <http://www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge>.